

The Pentagon's Ossified Strategy

Chalmers Johnson and E. B. Keehn

AMERICAN TROOPS are still in South Korea 45 years after the outbreak of the Korean War, five years after the end of the Cold War, and five years after Russia and China—South Korea's former aggressors—gave it official recognition. But is the American military, deployed largely as it was during the Cold War, still needed in East Asia today?

The Department of Defense answered that question in a report, supervised by Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph S. Nye, Jr., and released in February, entitled *United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region*. In a cover letter, Secretary of Defense William Perry wrote that the DOD strategy reports of 1990 and 1992 “envisioned post-Cold War troop reductions in the region through the end of the decade. This year's report, by contrast, reaffirms our commitment to maintain a stable forward presence in the region, at the existing level of about 100,000 troops, for the foreseeable future.”

The Department of Defense, in effect, has declared that nothing essential has changed in East Asia and that U.S. policy should be to freeze relations in the Pacific indefinitely. To many East Asians, such

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a policy shows that Americans do not comprehend how hollow their superpower pretensions are and that Japan and China have a few years to consolidate their ascendancy before telling the Americans that they are no longer even marginally useful. The DOD report also ignores the profound shifting around the world, particularly in East Asia, from military to economic power. Moreover, the maintenance of U.S. troops in Japan and South Korea at a cost of more than \$35 billion a year is a politically potent issue in America, where many believe both Asian nations have the economic resources to build and maintain sufficient defense forces.

Nye's opening metaphor has been picked up by officials throughout the administration. "Security is like oxygen," the report begins. "You do not tend to notice it until you begin to lose it. The American security presence has helped provide this 'oxygen' for East Asian development." The report then postulates:

—For the security and prosperity of today to be maintained for the next 20 years, the United States must remain engaged in Asia, committed to peace in the region, and dedicated to strengthening alliances and friendships.

—A continuing United States security presence is viewed by almost every country in the region as a stabilizing force.

—Japan and the Republic of Korea contribute to regional as well as their own security when they provide generous host-nation support for United States forces.

—United States interests in the region are mutually reinforcing: security and growth make it more likely that human rights will be honored and democracy will emerge, and democratization makes international conflict less likely because democracies are unlikely to fight one another.

—In thinking about the Asia-Pacific region, security comes first, and a committed United States military presence will continue to serve as a bedrock for America's security role in this dynamic area of the world.

—The Pacific Rim today is collectively the United States' largest trading partner.... Some 40 percent of global bank reserves are now in seven leading East Asian economies, compared with only 17 percent in 1980.... Our reliance on these and other sources of foreign capital further underscores Asia's growing importance to the United States.

—There is no more important bilateral relationship than the one we have with Japan. It is fundamental to both our Pacific security policy and our global security objectives. Our security alliance with Japan is the linchpin of United States security policy in Asia.

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—The United States National Security Strategy published in July 1994 is based on enlarging the community of market democracies.... [I]ts central goals are: to enhance security by maintaining a strong defense capability and promoting cooperative security measures; *to open foreign markets and spur global economic growth* [italics added]; and to promote democracy abroad.

The DOD report suggests a strategy that is devoted to buying the short-term cooperation of a number of East Asian states. They, in turn, see their relationship with the United States as a convenience that allows them to continue building their regional capabilities in preparation for the day when the United States can no longer support—financially, politically, or both—its flawed regional vision. The suggestion of the DOD report that Asians respect the American military presence in East Asia runs counter to the skepticism expressed by the former prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, in his *Foreign Affairs* interview of March 1994: “Nobody believes that an American government that could not sustain its mission in Somalia because of an ambush and one television snippet of a dead American pulled through the streets of Mogadishu could contemplate a strike on North Korean nuclear facilities like the Israeli strike on Iraq.”

UNHEALTHY DEPENDENCIES

THE UNITED STATES signed its first postwar security treaty with Japan in 1951. Japan had a devastated economy and was in the last stages of American military occupation, communists had swept to power two years earlier in China, the Korean War was in full swing, and the yen was 360 to the dollar. Today, Japan has the most modern industrial structure in the world, it has not run a trade deficit with the United States for almost three decades, the dollar has lost nearly 80 percent of its original postwar value against the yen, and Japan faces no known external military threat.

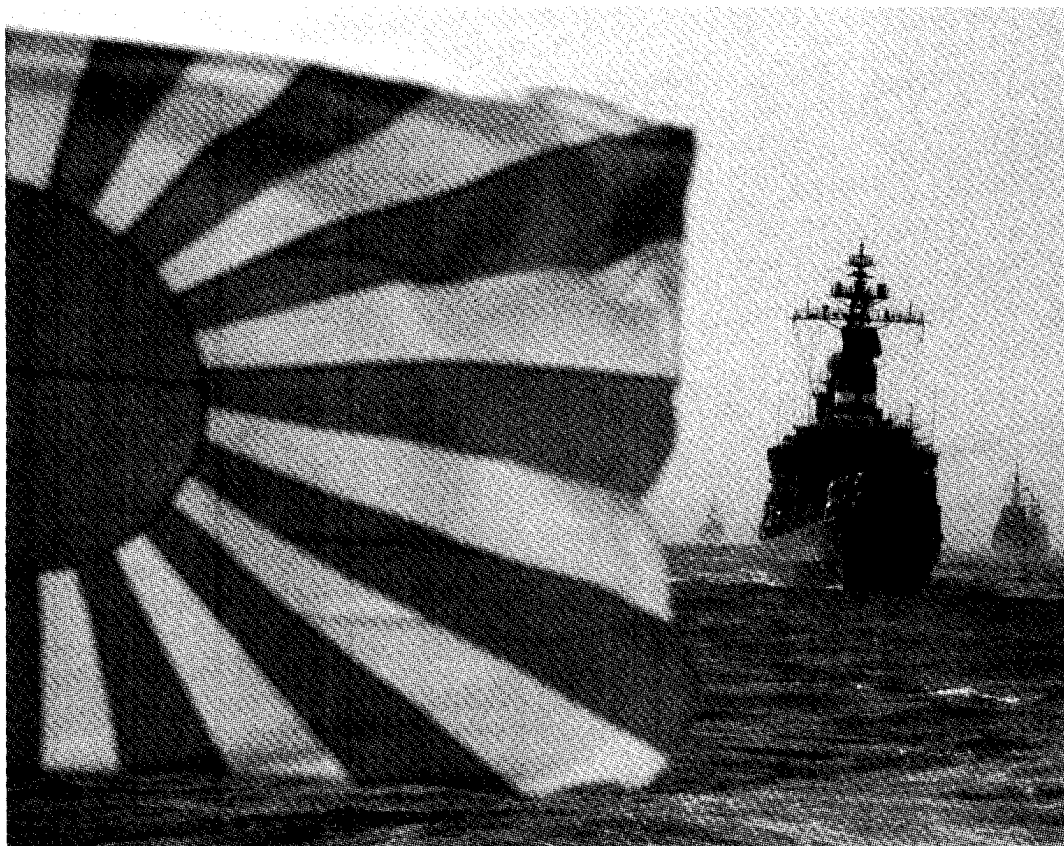
The Japanese establishment, not surprisingly, has welcomed the DOD report as a sign that the United States will continue to ignore the massive shift that has occurred in the balance of power—in Japan's favor. For Tokyo, the report means that the United States is unilaterally giving up its only real bit of leverage in dealing with its ruinous trade deficits. Yukio Okamoto, a former director of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's

North American bureau, avers that "after two years of an excessive emphasis on trade, U.S. policy toward Japan is finally returning to a sound one." That emphasis may be sound from a short-term Japanese point of view, but it is hardly a viable policy for the next 20 years. Given the current yen-dollar exchange rate, the 45,000 U.S. troops based in Japan cannot afford a bowl of noodles if they leave their bases. It does not take a Thucydides to see that such a relationship is unstable.

The Clinton administration should have reevaluated America's strategic interests in Japan in light of long-term changes in strategic and economic trends. It might then have concluded that a regional balance of power among China, Japan, and the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN), which is maintained in part by the United States in return for greater participation in the Asian economy, was needed for the next century. Instead, as the United States attempts to reassure the region with its continuing defense commitment, the economic factors creating a more independent Asia are exposing the frailty of the U.S. position. How can the United States indefinitely prop up an old alliance with Japan without the shared Cold War values and commonly perceived threats that created the alliance in the first place?

The Department of Defense may still see Japan as the linchpin of its security policy in Asia, but mutual interests are no longer assured. U.S.-Japanese economic tensions will continue to heighten in the years ahead, and these will inevitably bring new pressures on the security relationship. As Japanese Foreign Minister Yohei Kono pointed out in January, Japan's national interest is now more important than its "mere identity" as a member of the West because "[t]here is a growing view that we have entered an era when nations pit their economic interests and those of their region in competition against one another."

For the time being, however, the U.S. military presence is a convenient asset. As far as Japan's Ministry of Finance is concerned, contributing \$5 billion to the upkeep of U.S. troops in Japan is a budgetary windfall; it would be far more costly for Japan to finance its own defense. Locking the U.S.-Japan relationship in a Cold War time warp also postpones the day of reckoning when Japan's politicians will have to confront the problems inherent in Article Nine of



ROBERT WALLIS/SABA

Japan's U.S.-bestowed postwar constitution, which renounces war as a sovereign right of the nation. This time warp ensures that any leader in Japan who attempts to revise the constitution to allow Japan to engage in equitable risk-sharing will find it politically impossible to do so. Only an end to Japan's protectorate status will create the necessary domestic political conditions for Japan to assume a balanced security role in regional and global affairs.

The United States should recognize that its outdated security policy does not encourage a healthier liberal democracy in Japan but instead strengthens reactionary, narrow-minded political leadership. This type of leadership is by no means unique to Japan, but the collective amnesia of its political class on the subject of the Pacific War, which cuts across generational lines, should be as disturbing to the United States as it is to Japan's neighbors.

Japan's protectorate status is partially responsible for this amnesia. Unlike Germany, Japan's political leaders have never had to integrate their views into the confines of an alliance relationship based on sharing risks with their former enemies. While Germany entered

NATO in May 1955, the United States colluded with Japan's leaders to devote the country exclusively to economic growth even at the expense of developing a system of equal responsibilities in the U.S.-Japan security arrangement.

The legacy of this Cold War arrangement is seen in Japan's continuing debate over what it means to become an "ordinary country" (*futsu no kuni*), in the words of Ichiro Ozawa, the secretary-general of the main opposition party. To Ozawa, this means a country with a balanced portfolio of economic, technological, military, and other forms of power, used in concert with its allies and under the firm control of the nation's political leaders. Since the end of the 38 years of uninterrupted rule by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in 1993, discussion of the need for Japan to become an "ordinary country" has been the most important political debate in the country. It reopened the hitherto taboo topics of sovereignty, citizenship, and national responsibility that were foreclosed by the Security Treaty riots of 1960, which forced President Eisenhower to cancel his proposed visit to Japan.

The U.S. commitment to maintaining troops and bases in Japan well into the 21st century short-circuits this renewed internal debate and instead telegraphs America's lack of confidence in the ability of Japan ever to become an ordinary country. But Japan's failure to do so could produce the very instability the Defense Department claims it wants to avoid. In the words of Masataka Kosaka, one of Japan's foremost foreign affairs specialists, under current conditions, "Japan can neither identify itself with Europe and the United States nor live in peace in Asia."

The DOD report's assumptions lend credence to the idea that it is only the U.S. military that keeps the Japanese genie in the bottle. Japan, the argument goes, must be contained by an unequal defense arrangement for its own good and for the good of the rest of Asia. Until 1945, Japan never acted militarily as a balanced and fair-minded regional power. It therefore must never again have a regular military because a Japanese military that operates internationally would be sure to run out of control.

It is true, of course, that while civilian control of the military in Japan is constitutionally guaranteed, it is not well established in law and has never been operationally tested. The inability of the Japanese prime minister to exercise emergency powers in crisis situations—

shown both during the Persian Gulf War and in the aftermath of this year's Kobe earthquake—suggests that Japan has yet to develop institutions strong enough to allow it to function as a fully balanced state.

THE CENTER CANNOT HOLD

THE RECENT TENSIONS with North Korea over its nuclear program highlighted the awkwardness of Japan's protectorate status. Japan's U.S.-imposed constitution allows it to defend itself only if attacked. According to current interpretations, Japan cannot come to the aid of an ally who comes under fire from a common enemy. The Pentagon should ponder the specter of Japanese warships standing idly by while the United States takes major risks to defend South Korea. Popular support in the United States for any defense of Japan would instantly vanish. But the Japanese rightly perceive that aiding South Korea militarily may also be impossible for them because of their legacy of colonialism there.

If Washington understood East Asia as well as it understands Europe, policies would have been adopted long ago that would have precluded today's problems. It would have encouraged a more balanced Japanese approach to foreign policy options in East Asia and ensured that Japan was thoroughly integrated into an international alliance system. Over time, this would have encouraged the development of a robust cadre of foreign affairs specialists among Japan's politicians. Instead, the Japanese parliament, the Diet, remains a largely venal and parochial debating club that only rarely takes an interest in influencing Japan's international policies.

As the fiftieth anniversary of Japan's World War II defeat draws near, this problem is becoming plain. Over 270 Diet members, some born well after the war, have formed a bloc that, among other things, advocates a revision of Japan's modern history. "We did not fight against Asian countries," asserted the group's leader, former Justice Minister Seisuke Okuno. "Instead, we fought against the United States and Britain. Who committed the more serious war crime? It was the United States." In a democracy where serious policymaking rarely takes place in parliament and international affairs remain almost exclusively in the hands of the bureaucracy and a small party elite, it is

not surprising that such views not only survive in Japan but can muster a majority across party lines in the Diet. U.S. policy has aided and abetted this situation by maintaining Japan's protectorate status.

Unsettling though it may be to some American policymakers, the position that Japan should remain a perpetual servant of U.S. power and naturally accept U.S. interests as preeminent is an idea whose

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time has passed, if it was ever plausible. In fact, during last year's short-lived Hata administration, Japan began to edge toward recognizing a right of collective self-defense. The Hata cabinet suggested that Article 51 of the U.N. Charter, Article 5 of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, and the preamble to the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty all implicitly gave

Japan the right to enter collective defense arrangements. This debate was suspended when the conservative LDP entered into a coalition government with the Socialist Party and returned to power. As prime minister, this coalition put forward Tomiichi Murayama, a Socialist Party figure who, before coming to power, spent 30 years opposing the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and the arrangements for the defense of South Korea. The DOD report views such developments in Japanese national politics as irrelevant and assumes they will remain so well into the next decade.

If Japan is truly to remain the linchpin of U.S. strategy in Asia, any serious rethinking of U.S. security policy must center on rewriting or peacefully dismantling the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. Many see China's continued expansion as East Asia's greatest security challenge. But a more serious threat to a peaceful Asia-Pacific region is a United States that continues to distrust Japan's ability to act as a true ally. The regional leadership potential of Japan, including the possibility that it will balance the interests of the United States and China in East Asia, should not be underestimated. And ASEAN's calls for Japanese leadership are no longer muted. Leaders in Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand have all urged Japan to demonstrate greater regional political leadership. They are ready to put history behind them—even if South Korea, China, and a sizable portion of Japan's parliament are not—and encourage the develop-

ment of this balancing role.

It is only a matter of time before Japan responds. In preparation, the United States should create a more equal political and security relationship with Japan in order to adjust smoothly to the coming changes. Moreover, the DOD report's unilateral and total commitment to Japan as America's linchpin in the Pacific undercuts American diplomatic efforts to build multilateral institutions such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum or support those being undertaken by ASEAN without American endorsement.

WHISTLING IN THE DARK

SEVERAL OTHER contradictions and dubious formulations in the DOD report delude the American public and the international community about the urgent need for new strategies. The DOD report implies that America's wars, deployments, and alliances during the Cold War were the "oxygen" that made the East Asian economic miracle possible. But East Asia's own invention of state-guided capitalism did more to overcome communist militancy and wars of national liberation in the region than any military role played by the United States. The United States tends to forget that, at best, it fought to a stalemate in the Korean War and lost the one in Vietnam, and that the closing—due to the eruption of Mount Pinatubo and the actions of the Philippine Senate—of its two largest overseas bases, Clark Air Base and Subic Bay, produced not even a shiver of instability. The most odious regime in postwar Asia, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, was disposed of not by Americans but by Vietnamese communists.

The really important role played by the United States in the enrichment of Asia was in keeping U.S. markets open to high-quality, low-priced manufactured exports from Asia. The United States did this not just to benefit its own consumers, as economic ideologues would have it, but also as part of a grand strategy to sign up Asian countries on the American side in the Cold War. It traded access to the American market for basing rights, votes in the United Nations, and other often minimal gestures in support of U.S. foreign policy. The United States cannot perpetuate this policy indefinitely. It needs to increase domestic savings and cut consumption. Moreover, no sin-

gle distant foreign market can continue to absorb a majority of the exports from Japan, the newly industrialized countries (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore), Southeast Asia, and now China. The United States must also give economic preference to its Mexican and Latin American neighbors, even if this comes at the expense of some Japanese manufacturers in Southeast Asia.

The DOD report offers a military substitute for the failure of the United States to produce an effective trade and investment strategy toward East Asia. The remaining communist countries of the region, particularly China and Vietnam, are not attracted by the DOD report's "market democracies" but by what Eisuke Sakakibara of Japan's Ministry of Finance calls the "noncapitalist market economies." Despite American whistling in the dark that foreigners' taste for American movies, rock music, blue jeans, and McDonald's hamburgers means that the United States is still their model, this intellectual battle is over. Some version of Asian capitalism lies in most nations' future. Even the Russians, having tried Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs' brand of "pure" capitalism and found only chaos, now look to Asian models of "transitional authoritarianism."

The productive order that these countries crave cannot be supplied by an external military power, as envisioned in the DOD report, but must come from within a society. The distinctions between political, economic, social, and military spheres are a peculiarity of the Western social science mind that is neither shared in Asia nor sustained empirically. In his memoirs, Saburo Okita, Japan's late foreign minister and one of the architects of its postwar rebirth, wrote: "An army in uniform is not the only sort of army. Scientific technology and fighting spirit under a business suit will be our underground army." Until the Pentagon begins to understand this, its prescriptions for American national security in the Pacific are more likely to produce the opposite of what is desired. East Asian markets will not open wider to U.S. goods and services because of the presence of the Seventh Fleet. A threat to withdraw the fleet might provide some useful bargaining leverage, but the DOD report forecloses that option for the next 20 years.

The question is whether a U.S. commitment to a Cold War vision of East Asia until the year 2015 reflects a viable strategy or inertia and drift. The Pentagon's understandable desire to maintain old spend-

ing levels and military commitments should not drive U.S. regional strategy. The current limits of America's "superpower" position regarding its European and Japanese allies were apparent to Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger as far back as 1973. Today, however, neither the Democrats nor the Republicans are willing to offer new views on how U.S. strategic interests in East Asia should change to enhance regional security and mutual prosperity. The Clinton presidency remains woefully short of Asia hands thinking seriously about the future parameters of U.S. power in East Asia, and the Republican "Contract With America" studiously avoids mentioning foreign trade or investment. As high as the stakes currently are in East Asia, they are certain to be higher in the next decade. Adequate planning now, based on a forward-looking assessment of U.S. priorities and a realistic appraisal of the capabilities, needs, and long-term aspirations of U.S. allies in East Asia, will protect against scapegoating and destabilizing policy rifts later.

Perhaps the most demagogic claim made in the DOD report is that forward-deployed American troops are a force for democracy. "Having United States forces in Asia," the report argues, "also promotes democratic development in Asia, by providing a clear, readily observable example of the American military's apolitical role." This sounds like the old Christian missionary argument for the potential commercial value of missions in China. It was said then that the Chinese would watch how the missionaries lived and learn to want Western products. One wonders what the people of Kwangju, South Korea, learned about Americans from the 1980 massacre of civilians in their city by Republic of Korea troops, since until December 1, 1994, all South Korean troops were technically under the supreme command of an American officer. As author Frank Gibney has written, "The Kwangju bloodletting was the Korean equivalent of China's Tiananmen massacre—no less ruthless for having been perpetrated by an ally."

The DOD report takes credit for the growth of South Korea's democratic institutions under the cover of American-supplied stability. It would be more accurate to say that the presence of the American mil-

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itary in South Korea provided the cover for two military coups d'état and delayed democracy by at least a decade. This is not to say that the United States had no business being in Korea militarily, but it should have long ago revised its command-and-control structure and stopped behaving as if it were a colonial regime.

The real meaning and danger of the DOD report are that it is the Clinton administration's answer to the failure of its trade policy over the past two years. Even though it staffed its trade apparatus with lawyers and economists who knew nothing about East Asia, the administration still seems surprised that its efforts to open Japan's markets have turned out no differently from those of the previous three administrations. The Japanese have also used their formidable lobbying capabilities to savage the Clinton administration as protectionists and wreckers of the Japanese-American alliance. In this continuing effort, in which Japan argues that the United States must abandon its attempts to open Japanese markets to American goods lest Japan "retaliate" against U.S. bases by reducing their financial assistance, the Department of Defense has become a virtual pawn of the Japan lobby. The real leverage Japan has over the Pentagon is not U.S. bases there (although, in the words of the DOD report, "Japan supplies by far the most generous host nation support of any of our allies") but the military's dependence on important Japanese technologies—flat-panel computer displays, for example.

Rather than representing a new strategy, the DOD report is actually a sign of U.S. policy's bankruptcy in the new global economic center of gravity, East Asia. That is why it deserves to be widely discussed. Americans must begin to recognize that Cold War-style military power today is relevant to only a small and narrowing spectrum of policy problems. The real danger for the United States in the post-Cold War world is armed impotence. ②

Reviews



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